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This thesis is a collection of thirty poems written primarily over the seven-month span from September 1967 through March 1968. The poems here represent for me not only a conscious turning away from the formal metrics which had characterized my verse, but also a concentrated effort to view one central problem from various angles.

The collection is divided into three parts. The second and third sections are loose in their connections, serving to bring together poems which might be termed respectively 'poems of learning' and 'songs and dances.' The major part of the thesis, however, deals with the problem of self-definition. Assuming that everything is either "me" or "not-me," the mirror tells half the story, while entrance into other forms of life tells the other half. The title poem explores both of these possibilities. The first part of this poem, as well as other mirror poems, suggests that man's face appears in almost every imaginable circumstance. It often springs up when least expected, as in "From a Boat, Face Down." But, as the epigraph of the title poem states, man is best-loved when he is unseen: thus, the entrances. By imagining myself into the skin of animals or into the veins of leaves, I lose the human quality and identify with something more basic in nature. Total identification with animals, such as in "One Raccoon Fiendishly Murdered by a Mixture of Salt and Cement," or with growing plants, as in "Metastasis," expands the human consciousness beyond its normal bounds. It seems to me that what is lovable in man is not his humanity; but, despite his ritual concern with himself, his power to sense unity with other natural forms.

MIRRORS AND ENTRANCES

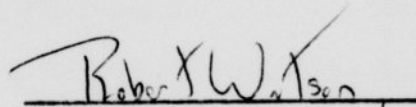
by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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I

We think we know ourselves better than others know us. But the truth is we only know the inside half, and it is doubtful whether any human being in varying moods can describe even that accurately. Moreover the little shop window we dress and expose to view is by no means all that others see of us.

Arthur Ponsonby

MIRRORS AND ENTRANCES

For anyone to love a man, he must be hidden,
 for as soon as he shows his face, love is gone.
 Dostoevsky

i

Windows and seawater harp back the same jangle:
 insurgent features congeal to my own,
 rising unwanted in mirrors, like ghosts
 determined to haunt. No matter how long
 I hang by the pool, I'm still no legendary
 flower. I begin to embrace new surroundings.
 But one can't enter water the way clouds become
 the sky in rain. Water has no sense
 of man tossing shells and whirling
 the sand. Fractures mending, glass
 reappears: and faces once loved for their dimness
 come clear without prompting; faces once restless
 as water-currents settle flatly and are undisturbed.

ii

I love to enter animals and trees:
 the man is gone then, hidden
 by furred skin or leaves so dense

cardinals are unseen. In them,
what's base is graceful. Passions
jerk autumn from brilliance to sleep;
there is no question of ethics. Bound
by the flesh in beasts, impressions
enter only through sense. But in leaves,
how can you ask for touch? Wheeling
like 'copters or swinging still fastened
securely on limbs, leaves know
nothing but motion. Leaves
are alone in their pleasure. My forgery
matters only the way wind on water
at twilight is loved for its vanishing.

WINDOWS

We shape our buildings and afterwards
our buildings shape us.

Winston Churchill

We dress our store from inside, exposing
careful displays. The window-view
wears handsome parades. Looking
out we see, through graceful figures,
eyes gazing in and turning away.
Never shifting our watch inside,
we wonder why their scan blunders by.

Looking in shopwindows to survey graceful
arrangements, we see behind muddles
of stock, racks and shelves confused;
and shopkeepers staring out: as if windows
told only their hollows, as if proof were shouldered
by skins and borne by faultless display.

The storewindow sails beside me,
transparent as a snakeskin, shed
in season but blistered inside.
Ghosts lodge in the pane, mocking

my action awkwardly. One specter
hisses flippantly, dooming
my eyes to squint no more
at displays or shopkeepers; but pressing
them back to answer and expose
the questions they might once have asked.

CROSSING TOWN

Surprised by the making of choices,
I caught an unmarked bus, looking
for the same street in a different town.
Crazy how names repeat, how roads,
how trees seem similar. Faces
are flatly distinguished; no
eyes betray the same grace; voices
cast charms in different ears. Crazy
how people repeat, despite choices
and chance distinctions. Man's response,
his taunting questions, however diverse,
graph equivalent lines.

Surprised how eyes
ask questions before voices, I
answer and find someone distinct.
Assessing his eyes, his voice, and his face,
I count differences both rimming and deep.
Whether by chance or design, he inquires
about a different street in the same
town. Obligated by this meeting, we talk;
and while riding busses, agree to look together.
We see only our faces clearly glassed back.

SATIRE IN THE MIRROR: MY FACE

Satire is a sort of mirror wherein beholders
do generally discover everybody's face but
their own.

Jonathan Swift

There's always a good joke in the morning mirror:
my face staring from and through the glass.
Its playful warning's usually ignored;
its threat to set is wasted. The form has

such solid lack of continuity
that rarely does morning's face resemble night's.
Dumbly, I mumble who or how or why;
the image passes to another sight.

In the end, an external object is plaster
and takes on a permanent set (clearly conjured
anytime). But a change of face happens so fast,
the process of knowing only can be for a second.

It's a lifelong job, and rarely done, that someone
discovers a self hiding structured in the glass.
There is no valid proof though there's often
a sketchy guess--there has to be some guess.

Nothing is as it looks to me. But really
the joke is how so much depends on that one face
as it is or as what I distill it to be.
My eye can't even put itself in place.

FROM A BOAT, FACE DOWN

Quarrels of snake weeds surface and plunge
 whorled downward through black, brackish water.
 The shoals: where a sidetracked current eddies,
 where the washing run distinguishes itself
 from more secret channels. Where does gnarled
 water catch its speed? From the reeds.
 Twining or simply drifting, grass
 propels the deepest tide.

Hiding

in recesses of plants, tight water-beasts
 unfurl. The sounds are of crisp shells
 cracking stiffly the delicate shoal.
 Tones slither down reeds, spiral
 outward, color the tide's density
 with quiver, with pitch.

Hardly seeing

these animals, eyes circle deeper,
 for darkness hides marvels close under
 such guise. Slithering downward, how sight
 loses judgment. Grass and sounds swarm, seen
 less distinct in the gathering murk.
 My face explodes upward erasing the sand.

METASTASIS

I

Morning razors through pane, shade, the lid
 of my eye: how to excise growths behind
 is delicate. Waking is conscious of vines trailing,
 twining ears from inside, scraping bark
 like scales from the linings of my head to be coughed
 and spat. Waking sponges and sutures; the cut
 must come from outside, scoring the crust, uprooting
 the vines, ripping leaves and ragged trunks.

II

Mirrors draw on my face, surfacing bile:
 it runs out one eye, flooding the tiles yellow.
 My face pales. Sticky glacial currents
 worm up walls: sprouts occur, and roots
 sucking down. Vines erupt from floor cracks,
 escalate to the roof. Bark scales walls:
 windows eclipse, leaves impend. I am clean,

menaced by decay outside. The door is gone,
the floor diseased, and height is no escape.

III

One eye tears, impressed by harsh
staccato twigs. Vision is impaired, nothing
gets washed away. The eye sprouts leaves
from outside while bark pries into the blindness.
The other eye ogles: wary of vanity,
but marveling how vines creep over the nose,
how brown encrusts the neck, how legs
are rooted down into the floor. That eye
must stare while limbs and trunk harden,
where leaves fall like razors into sleep.

LATE AUTUMNAL WALK

Wizen tree fingers stretch around
 to themselves to scratch at greened leaves.
 I wind beneath, eyes climbing
 through branches to grab at lingering sun.
 When like a bucket color tips off the tree
 painting my face and some leaves
 with its orange, one eye sticks shut.
 The skin hardens and cracks: chips
 speckle orange the grass. December
 does not bare trees here: some veins
 still are green.

My fingers ache back
 stretching blue veins up, straight
 through snaking arcs of cloud. Smudging
 white follows to blue: knocks
 another migrating pail off its limb:
 spatters my hair and chin yellow,
 mats my left shoulder stiff. Leaves
 fall in droves, colored heavily.

Great heaps of orange and yellow flake
 from my face, from the limbs: but

the trees still are green, rising arched
from my finger-tips, and warmed by the sun.
Now my bones are green, rooted down
bare and knobbed, dusted by earth.
My face still burns orange under the paint,
and the yellow mat is somehow my own.

CYCLE WITH TREES

i

Birch limbs
glance but divorce
before worrying
back: bodies
bent double to twine;
branches swollen
with ice.

ii

Awkward buds
bungle leafing.
Your shoulders,
overhanging,
swallow my shadow
deliciously.

iii

I snapped
flat off a limb
dumped on your glossy
unveined flank.
Shuffled by winds,
our falls rattled together;

we were raked
together by dawn gatherers.

iv

Impending fruits
bow to ripeness
but you can't pick
apples
from a cherry tree.

v

The arched bough of you
tiers over me
evergreen
celebrating roots.

WATCHING FOR BIRDS

Sitting cross-legged on a maple arm, my limbs
spread clamped to knotted bark; eyes probe
evasive leaves. Somewhere locked in hiding
my birds freeze, mock wards of insensitive
trees. I'm sprung. Uncurbed by drumming
wings within my ribs: weights are gone,
and unexplained rumblings in hollow places.
The beasts flew out: abandoning quietly
an empty bone-cage that rattles now idly,
watching for dark soft wings, sharp talons, beaks.

ONE RACCOON FIENDISHLY MURDERED
BY A MIXTURE OF SALT AND CEMENT

For my experience is that life is full of big
certainties and small surprises. You can
usually tell that the knock is coming, but the
details are unexpected.

Joyce Cary

What is a raccoon's life if not
certain? All day, all year
build and store; raze; restore,
and wait. About one hour
ago the knock came: I
expected a fight, a trap,
a loud bright flash. I might
never have guessed a death
quite so deliberate.
Even the rage hardens
and flows slower, thicker.
I am the quick, about
to sink toward death. The ground
is gone. My foot is gone.
I feel from inside my skin:
the blood bends casually
as if the joint were meant

quite stiff, as if that awkward
tail were mine. Deliberately
one foot forces another
step. None follows. Surprised
by details like these, I fail
to feel the usual salt
harden a cough in my throat.
My head thickens, glazes.
I am a glazier, my mind
and eyes fuse: torch and glass
are one in the dimming light.

BALLOONS

They always take my lips roughly
in mouths tight and wet:
they blast air, drive it down
my throat. Already dry
and cracking inside, my neck
expands double, my chest
inflates. Joints resist; but fingers
and arms, the shoulders' lock floods.
All limbs jerk full at once, then stretch.
The body lightens, lifts slightly.
I resist the tight skin; ignore
the cord lacing my lips; refuse
more driving wind. But stranded
hesitantly in unusual regions,
the drawn skin takes on pleasure:
lips open to the wet blast willingly,
and I accept the notion to break.

CHASING YOUR FACE

Up like a kite flying, your face,
cross-pinioned on a string by tree limbs,
soars idly in the late March wind.
No tug from a lower branch reveals
that string; so, my limbs straining
for hold, I toss away fright, draw
my sight one arm farther from grass.
How flat, from this height, are earth,
its greened mat. Whatever ridges, hollows
I danced through, chasing your face
to its lodge in the tree, they ravel
then plane until nothing thrusts outward
but the tree and its limbs, the kite
lashing free. I climb higher buoyantly,
confident, careful of twigs,
to balance incredibly on one commanding leaf.
Then, ignoring the grass, the prosperous tree,
up like a kite flying, my face, facing yours,
soars wildly away on April's young breeze.

TUMBLE GOOD AND UP AGAIN

Looking for something bizarre in winter, my feet
slide left; hips compensate right, but the jerk
opens worlds of fallings. I slip in the snow,
recite the Koran backwards halfway down.
Great magnolias crack plasticcoated applause.
Tumble good, someone laughs up the street, guessing
I'll move on. Tumble good, I think, my hands freezing raw;
my clothes and the ice on the road locked firmly;
my face turning blue. Tourists point gloved hands
and laugh when a dog's tongue sticks to my hair.
Where do you suppose she comes from? No one cares,
but it's friendly to speak. Then, I recite Frost,
suggesting snow as Vermont's normal green.
They move on bored by such fantasies, as night lands
beside me attracted too by the ice. We play
canasta till I notice I'm sitting alone at dawn.
Two handsprings and up again sliding
down lamp posts, I'm watching for tourists and sights.

ELASTIC LADDER

Rungs impress soles harshly,
as if ladders were not to climb.

Sagging, stretching double, the bars
wrap and squeeze a right ankle;

the left hangs free. Bones crush;

the loud snappings distress

as much as pain, until one

ungainly blood-flecked knob

insinuates through the skin: then

the pain is one's own. Eyes, ears,

this foot no longer watch rungs

impose; the ache shocks from inside.

The left still hangs free, untried.

Reaching the next step, the foot tests,

concludes, moves up: twisting

crushed bones behind. Ladders

stretch readily, adjusting rungs

inside, and those who survive

don't know they are victims.

SOUTH-GUESS AND OUTWARDLY

Twelve brick toes kick at the apple
until all sky lights green over: go
but not west till you trip on a stack
of red needles. Trapping a course
south-guess and outwardly,
ice-jags fall rarer. At least once,
I myself fall needlessly cutting an eye
on the toe of a tree. They paint this cut
clean, and closed on that end: the blood
oozes inward.

I meet at right angles
steer trampling east for spring,
but spring over the herd, knicking
only my heel. They track the blood
east; I drag bricked prints south,
aiming each cubed toe toward a needle eye.
All are grey. Eleven toes engage,
one is impaled. The blood steals outward
painting red and closing the guess clean.

II

MISTAKEN AGAIN

Digging and raking my brain shakes loose
chains of great errors: my personal
blunders. One wonders about causes: ancestors,
surroundings, plain slips on my own. Now grown
and watching errors bloom behind, I marvel
how life stumbles still waking, not breaking yet
from their weight, but straying daily toward others.
One day, for instance, I mistook myself,
though curious, as incapable of love. No words
now can cure the damage touching him.

THE FALL: BANKS ISLANDS, NEW HEBRIDES

According to tribal legend, age is shed, old skin first,
the way snakes and crabs renew themselves in season. And
immortality was lost when a girl's failure to recognize
her grandmother caused the rejuvenated woman to seek her old skin.

i

Sixty winters gone, I flay myself
on the riverbank, casting wrinkled skin
away. First fingers, cracked at the joints,
scale off. Toes peel the same way, tracking
stretches of skin like elastic to the knee
which comes off whole, shredding again at the thigh.
The back is hardest, but by rubbing crosswise
on tree trunks, bark loosens folds
which strip unwillingly like glue resisting
hanging objects too heavy. My face peels last,
hugging at nose and ears. Eye slots
gaping, lips paling apart from teeth:
age's casing drops by the river.
I am renewed, I begin again to live.

ii

My grand-daughter swings a snakeskin in arcs:
opaque cells catching light suddenly,
the way mirrors glint when tipped. Her eyes
laugh, snakes being far away, days

being long for play. My grand-daughter runs
arcs around aging: each week stretches
her skin tight on strong bones. She greets a stranger,
but my voice snakes up her arm, her legs
pivoting to run, her face catching wrinkles of fear.

iii

I am a young woman, ghost of her friend:
no longer furrowed like spring fields
and seamed in familiar places. Age
fell away with skin tossed to the riverbank,
and I take on smooth features.

But her face,
her frightened eyes driven to panic by this voice
scold me to run arcs on the riverbank, hunting
that shed case; startle young limbs to pull
the skin on like shrunken stockings; impress
me to smooth edges on gaps around eyes and ears.
She smiles at me. My toothless mouth grins back.

THESE LAST DAYS: A CARESS
for Mabel E. Glascock

I remember your round eyes
before the devil of your flesh
began to eat your flesh. No lies
are needed to make us feel less
helpless: we accept that you will die.

This, the third time we've realized
that near end: and prayed that whatever
preys on you might let you free. The dry
hospital cant about 'success' never
undoes what the knife didn't reach. Why

can't that knife put back your sagging flesh?
Your eyes no longer laugh the lies
of life. When death becomes a wish,
dying seems longer, minutes magnify
into lifetimes. Have the time of your life, grandmother,
these last days. The ways we pick to justify
life are artless, but joy is as good as any other.

BUT THE GAME HAS RULES

A boy sits alone in a sand-pit:
he crawls after tin soldiers, not thinking to quit
for lunch--a whole troop has been hit.

But the action is nothing alone:
the men move mechanically. Each
gun spits fire spurred on
by an unrelated hand that teaches
death which it doesn't understand.
What toy could ever know
the amazing eyes of a dying man?
Nor does the boy really show

any symptoms of love. He plays
no favorites: at night he lays
the foes together in a box. For days

he may forget both killers
and those fortunate dead who shall rise again
to begin again and kill, but never
be killed again, because when

the boy still moves a metal man,
no death can be permanent. A boy
alone rearranges lives of tin, but the plan
is all his--no choice is left to the toys.

They play by the rules or not at all.
And the rule is that two must crawl
together--two can fight where one alone must fall.

THE RITUAL TRAILS

i. We all resist shrinkage

Daily edging apart
to stoney corners: silence
rings echoing wasted years.
We warp like water-moist wood,
are pledged to bend like ropelinks,
taut and shrunk from wear.

ii. A parents' rage

You watch our desperate growing,
extend a gentle thumb
to pluck the billowing peal.
By chance, nudging a heartbeat,
that nail robs the pulse.
Unsettled throbs corrupt back to time,
though your pointed rage prompts
pocked gullies to twitch, should we forget.

iii. Youth admits to portents of age

We are blinded, as guilty age
hovers above your eyes.
That visor lifts, and parries
our insulting growth. Infected

by seasons wheeling ritual
trails, all eyes keel inward
reflecting craters of absence.
We foul the lips we issue from,
the stones we turn to bear.

WHAT I AM NOT, I AM

i

Eyes look around,
see too much detail.
Behind my mind
a movie re-runs,
for the ninth time,
how one detail
seems alive, how
I become that detail.
Scaling mountains,
I see no sky.
I am the sloping mountain,
high and scaled with trees.
Eyes open betray no such detail,
unglaze and retrace
the obvious sky.

ii

Cuffed with dissonance
rough colors
carve stinging ears;
jolt my ears to forget themselves,
to fall off...
and the music comes cleaner.

iii

A thorn cuts, finds blood:

pain washes;

the pain rains out.

My name is erased.

My name is pain.

iv

The knot tightens,

gnarls and cores.

I don't hear.

I don't see.

I don't bleed.

I am the core knotting,

tearing glazing.

I am the tear

dropping amazing blood

to cover the knot

in my core.

v

Replace my mind,

my face, my nerves

with an absence

carved by detail,

bombarded by sight
and sound and touch.
I am the negative space.
I am the shadow
of this surrounding pace.

III

UNEXPECTED PERFORMANCE

Shattering the whirl of expectant
voices, the worn curtain
jerked apart: the performance
was expected to astound. SHE
timidly glanced, then toed
her path center. At once
shivering the light image,
she danced shadows quivering
across the stage. Instruments answered,
shaking sounds at her feet.
The violin grew a tremendous
tremolo: her feet felt the beat
invade and quavered closer
thump-thump to the edge. Then, clearly
watching the edge, she forgot her feet,
and, my god, she danced right off the stage.

MERLIN'S BEARD

Though thick and full, Merlin's beard
trips him, and he falls.
He never can find the end
to tie it in knots. He calls,
but no one will sweep it
into a ball. But, for all
that, a boy pulls it. Merlin waves
his wand: the boy becomes a toad.
The magic man dances an ingenious jig
to ward off spirits from the road.
He stumbles ("that damn beard!"),
but recovers ("I'm not so old,
after all."). But the beard seems thinner now--
does it shrink? Merlin's beard
grows shorter the longer it grows.

SATURDAY NOON

I waltz flat-footed and naked
over chairs, over tables, onto walls:
the room toes awake with dancing.
One plant tips, trapping the cat.
My feet fly out. Faced on

two sides by windowpanes,
my eyes prance through. Two boys
handspring like geysers whirling
unfurling across bustles
of snapping leaves. I smile;

stand up; then silencing the boys
planing my lawn of leaves,
require my legs' joy to scurry again.
My eyes crack the other pane:

a bent woman squats, churns over
in a muddled ball, then springs
to the nearest tree. All three
flutter in a heap with leaves.

Saturday noon on our block

dangles, unhinged, from a tree.

My curious eye rambles, transposes
limbs. One clumsy toe strains
to catch a table leg: sprawls noisily
the walnut table on my leg, me on my back.

I waltz flat-footed and naked
watching women, leaves and boys
reel, the windowpanes fencing
their sport. No eyes glance back
at my dancing skinless, alone.

NOT PERFORMED IN HIS LIFETIME

Pencilled words dim pianissimo no
scatters of shuffling notes. Obsidian stones
stipple: obviously arranged to vibrate the eye.
They stir unheard, like muzzled, quivering dogs
trying to unleash themselves, caring that the ache
is constant, but untold.

Notes smell like blue iris
remembered from one April when he strained each spotted
stone, spinning it to the page. They smell like blue iris
stale and wrinkled by May.

Fingers gently
wheedle them, nudging confusion into the page.
They vibrate black spindles through his arm, jab
cold-crashing icons between his ears. Imagine
how to compose scores of scattered black,
exhaling strains of iris, and jabbing behind
his eyes a buzzing stone. Imagine, how locked
in a trunk, musty and rumped with years: notes
scatter on against obsidian stones; ignoring
torn velvet linings which suck each one dumb
in turn to soft-napped black play.

AUBADE

While a bird's cry shatters
eyes awake, our limbs unwind.
Trying not to see grey
creeping to the sky, the surprise
of tree limbs fracturing panes
breaks easily our dry heads apart.
No mourning begins today with remorse.
The reel of dusk is reversed:
colors strike muted, then flush
with no hope of fading. Risking
night, we fancied ambushed dawn
might never come to prove
us older by its light. Your greying
head bows, my eyes crack
with tender desire. To say now:
'this is love' is beside the point.
Night is getting on toward grey.

THE BLIND BOY'S SONG

We talk as if on the telephone: voices dangle
in ears, the sounds creasing a slender dark trail.
You are an unlocked sound, forked, boundless
and traced only by crumbs. I am unnerved by fruit
hanging loosely, by measured puzzles, by my own wonderings:
can this voice also sing? You do. Three fingers
rest on your throat, my right hand near your mouth. The song
shafts my ear, the voice disturbs my hands: not harshly,
but firmly, the way sprinkled sand removes a fire.
Word-tracks print craters up the nerve of my arm. My fingers' eye
paints your voice green, fragile and layered like shale.

SONG OF AN ACROBAT

On a bar, just this side is shaky. When I fall closer
to one edge, the other seems tried. I push that side away.
The bar balances my foot in its slide. I depend.
When swinging, I disengage sharply, praying you'll stay
mid-air, arms out; afraid my shaking hands will slide;
knowing you'll make it right. I've never tried
to swing alone. My living breaks records for being
close to the bone. With you, I'd risk flying. High,
wheeling inverted down planks, spinning a ball
on my soles, I cycle looking up. I depend so much
for these little things, I forget, in the end, I'm alone.

SONG OF THE SIDE-SHOW DWARF

Pointing laughter the other way, I conjure
a side-show in the center ring. The jugglar,
two clowns, aerialists, ribboned ponies:
I'd dart past these, the way children dash,
forgetting me, the caged lions and monkeys, to see
Siamese twins joined at the side. I'd speed
to the center ring: there, the ringmaster lisps
the acts, and blushes if a trainer winks back.
I'd spotlight these two after the show as they slip
out of the tent together, and follow them, laughing.
It's not really a question of humor,
but who, besides the ringmaster, ever asked me to tea.

SONG OF ONE PYROMANIAC

I watch the match consume itself on my sleeve;
the coat flickers and catches. One hand, trying
to ignore the warmth, passes across what for a moment
is the trunk of a man: it receives the flame.

The crowd gauges the act. My mind, engaging
only in flame-fed jabs, forgets the match,
loses the measure. I am the torch to fire
the world. Few who stare know hell is ice.
Twice I've started to shout, "Cold, it's cold
in here encased by fire." They'd believe
the complaint. I almost believe.

The body curve becomes a fall of flame,
rolling, bounding, suspended in a leap. A flash
of arm or head jerks, and is lost in the fire.
Flames shadow the man, crowd at his head.
He inhales spastic gulps: his tongue, his throat
are charred. His voice rasps, doesn't forgive
or blame. A silent grating is his only claim.